AAC Smelter Should Cut Its Production

The pictures on these two pages today show that fluoride emissions from the Anaconda Aluminum Co. smelter near Columbia Falls kill conifer trees.

The picture of the two sets of mule deer teeth indicates the fluoride injures game living in the high intensity fallout area near the smelter.

The smelter's fluorides have visibly injured trees on approximately 3,000 acres of public land administered by the United States Forest Service, and indications are that if emissions continue at the present rate, trees in Glacier National Park will begin to show visible signs of damage. Conifers inside and around Columbia Falls are suffering quite visible damage.

There are two cures for the smelter's problems:

1. A cutback in the number of potlines operating. Five potlines are now in operation. A sharp cutback would reduce fluoride emissions to the point where damage to trees and wildlife would cease.

2. The development of pollution control techniques capable of cutting fluoride emissions back to non-injurious levels.

At this time technology has not found a means capable of bringing the Columbia Falls smelter's potlines into compliance with standards under the state air pollution control law. The standards take effect for the smelter next year.

That leaves the public and AAC two alternatives:

1. To grant the smelter a variance next year under the law. A variance could let the smelter continue to pollute at the present rate. When air pollution control technology caught up, then the smelter could be brought into compliance with the law. This would occur at some indefinite future date.

2. Again, cut back on the number of potlines operating.

Since it is obvious that the present level of fluoride emission cannot continue without steadily increasing the damage to the surrounding countryside, including damages to substantial swaths of public property, and since it is clear the company cannot comply with air pollution control standards in time, our conclusion is that the smelter should be required by the state to cut back its production so that emissions are held to non-damaging levels.

When the time comes that technology enables the smelter to collect and cleanse its fluorides adequately to comply with pollution control standards, then — and only then — should production be allowed to resume at present levels.